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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

نحمده ونصلي على رسوله الكريم

THE CONCEPTION OF GOD IN ISLAM*

Although it is against the policy of the *Review of Religions* to publish lengthy articles in one and the same issue, the present contribution should be regarded as an exception because it deals with a subject which is best dealt with in one issue. The learned Professor starts with the proposition in such a clear and lucid manner that the reader feels inclined to follow him to the end—Ed.]

I

When the subject is an Islamic conception, we have first to turn to the holy Quran and the Hadith. We should find, in the former, the fundamentals and, in the latter, interesting and important details of that conception. We have then to turn to a study of the history of Islam and of the general character of Muslim life and attitude for an assessment of the practical nature of that conception. And there is one thing more which a Muslim dealing with an Islamic conception may still have to do, and that is to search out the depths of his own belief and draw on his own experience of Islam. Talking about the conception of God in Islam, I need hardly say that I possess none of

*(Lecture delivered at Lyallpur on March 25, 1944 by Professor Muhammad Aslam, Head of the Deptt. of Philosophy, Government College Lahore.

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the important qualifications needed—neither learning, nor insight, nor experience, not in any degree at least that is worth speaking of. Still I am willing to discuss this subject of God. And I am willing because I feel I belong to that democracy of faith which gives to each member almost the right to describe and discuss this great and central idea which has drawn that democracy together. I am willing to make the attempt even if it is in the manner of the shepherd of the Mathnavi whose effusions about God seemed so utterly improper to Moses but which to God Himself did not seem half so improper. And in making the attempt I am quite content to draw on such interpretations of the Quran and the Hadith and such versions of Muslim history as seem to me to be authoritative and well-grounded and such experience of God as any ordinary believer might have.

II

When the source book is the holy Quran there is one short cut to every subject. That is the Fatiha, the opening chapter, the epitome of the Quran. The Fatiha has been called the Ummul-Quran or the Mother of the Quran. The Fatiha is the root, the rest of the Quran are its branches. Any difficulties arising over the interpretation of specific points about the Quran may be referred to the Fatiha. The Fatiha has also been called the Umm-ul-Kitab, or the Mother-book. Book in religious parlance means a religious law or teaching. The Fatiha as the Mother-book contains in substance the durable part of the other religious teachings and is, therefore, also able to tell us in what respects it agrees and in what does it disagree with the current versions of those teachings. When we wish to define an Islamic conception, that is exactly what we wish to know. We wish to know the fundamentals of that conception and also the points in respect of which those fundamentals are to be distinguished from other well-known conceptions. That is exactly what the Fatiha, as the epitome of the Quran, is able to tell us. It almost does service for the whole of the Quran.

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The Fatiha, as everybody knows, consists of seven short verses :

1. In the name of Allah, the Graceful, the Compassionate ;

2. All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds ;

3. The Graceful, the Compassionate ;

4. Master of the Time of Judgment ;

5. Thee alone do we worship, and Thee alone do we ask for help ;

6. Guide us to the straight path ;

7. The path of those whom Thou hast favoured ; not of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray.

If we leave alone the Bismillah which takes its place at the head of every Chapter of the Quran and is part of every Chapter—as it is part also of the Fatiha —we find the rest of the Fatiha setting forth four or five important, we may even say, basic attributes or names of God, and the same number of prayers addressed to God, the prayers following the names in order. To formulate broadly the conception of God as taught by Islam one needs only to draw out the meaning of these attributes and the purpose of these prayers. There is a lot else in the Quran. But for an idea of the fundamentals of the Muslim conception of God, we want little else.

But we need not leave out the Bismillah which I said is part of the Fatiha as it is part of every Chapter of the Quran.

The Bismillah has a tremendous interest for an understanding and appreciation of the Islamic conception of God. It introduces us at once to the large subject of the evidence of Islam and of religion in general. Nobody can discuss any particular religious conception or any particular religion without the haunting uncertainty about the validity of the very phenomenon of religion. Is religion valid ? Is what it teaches essentially true ? Our group loyalties keep us

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in religious groups but now and then we do not fail to raise the question whether this business of religion ultimately has any sound foundation at all. My own interest is not merely to describe the conception of God which Islam teaches but also to try and see if that conception has any valid foundation. The Bismillah at the head of every Chapter of the Quran enables me to mention this subject. As everybody knows religion did not have its first introduction into the world with the revelation of the Quran. There had been revelations and prophets before. But if religion is true this manifold of revelations and prophets must shape itself into a consistent whole. It must yield a connected story, a story which beginning with the beginning of creation should unfold epoch after epoch as a continuous spiritual progression. That is exactly the view which Islam takes and teaches of God and religion. It seeks to have come in fulfilment of old promises—promises made by God to earlier teachers in earlier books. One of the clearest of such promises is contained in Deuteronomy 18 : 18 in which Moses is promised *a prophet like unto Moses, one from among the brethren of Israelites and one who would speak in the Name of the Lord.* When the Prophet appeared before the Quraish as a lone teacher, the object of their surprise and sneers, one of the strangest things he announced to them was that he had come to them as Moses had come to the Pharaoh. We have in one of the earliest Meccan verses :

انا ارسلنا اليكم رسولاً شاهداً عليكم كما ارسلنا الى فرعون رسولاً ط

> Lo! We have sent unto you a messenger as witness against you, even as We sent unto Pharaoh a messenger. (73 : 16).

Only a mad man could have made this claim. And so did the Quraish say the Prophet was. But the Prophet was not mad. Everybody knew he was not. The charge was malicious. But if any doubt was left it was dispelled by the onward march of events. In two's and in three's the Prophet's enemies came over to his side. The revelations of the Quran mounted

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up into an immortal book of law. The Prophet was a descendant of Ishmael to whose progeny the promised Prophet was to belong according to the Deuteronomy prophecy. Every Chapter of the Quran began with the words of the Bismillah. "In the Name of Allah the Graceful, the Compassionate." Such an important feature was it of the revelations of the Quran that the Prophet said he knew the ending of one Chapter and the beginning of another, from the revelation of Bismillah. The Bismillah then is an important little verse. It puts the Quran and the Prophet in line with the rest of religious history and makes religion a consistent whole, a connected story such as it should be proceeding from one Purposeful and Powerful God. We have in the Bismillah evidence not only of Islam but of religion in general. The clear wording of the Deuteronomy prophecy, the strange circumstances of the Prophet, the shape and design which the revelations of the Quran assumed, the fact that the Prophet was one of the Ishmaelites, are all such as to exclude all possibility of either deliberate contrivance or chance coincidence. The Bismillah every time it occurs in the Quran reminds us of this strange promise and even stranger fulfilment. It is evidence of the truth of the Quran. It is evidence of God.

III

The text of the Fatiha on which for the time being we have to concentrate contains the following attributes of God and these we must follow in order to get at the Islamic conception. These are

1. رب العلمين Rabbul Alamin
2. رحمن Rahman
3. رحيم Rahim
4. مالك يوم الدين Malik Yaum-uddin

You will notice that I am speaking of the attributes. Actually in the Bismillah itself and the first verse of the text of the Fatiha we have another import-

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ant word and that is the word Allah. This is the proper name of God not one of His attributes. It is one of the distinctions of the Arabic language and of Islam that it has a Proper Name for God. Other languages and other religions use attributive names for God, names derived from other words and from which other words could be derived, names which can be and often are used in the plural. Even the Jewish name—Jehovah is such. It is very like the Arabic Ya ho-wa, *i.e.*, "He that Is." It is a point of no small interest that there is a proper name for God and that name is in Arabic and has been made current by Islam. It means that religious history before Islam was a plan to lead to Islam and religious history subsequent to Islam is the history of Islam. In the lists of attributes of God—called the Beautiful Names of God, current in Muslim theological literature Allah figures as a proper name. In the Arabic language the name is used for nothing else. It has no plural form. It has not been derived from any other word and no other word can be derived from it. A proper name for God is evidence of the seriousness with which His Being and Existence are regarded in Islam.

We will now take the four attributes in order. Every one of these has a large and well-defined content and this content can be derived from the various forms in which these attributive terms are used in the Arabic language. The attribute 'Rabbul Alamin' points to the following among other features of God as conceived by Islam :

To be Rab is to be one who creates, develops and promotes to perfection. It carries with it the sense therefore of Creator, Developer and Sustainer, and Alamin carries the sense of varieties as well as periods of existence. The Quran does not employ the attribute of Ab or Father for God which it evidently regards as a weak form of Rab. By using the attribute of Rabbul Alamin it points to the universal providence of God and to His Knowledge of all the secrets of His creation. Being the Creator, Developer

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and Sustainer of all the worlds the God of Islam provides for the spiritual sustenance of all peoples and all periods just as He provides for the physical sustenance of all peoples and all periods. The point is of great importance, and takes us to the heart of the problem which arises from the fact of the plurality of religions. The religions are often in conflict. There are religions which claim for themselves an exclusiveness of status. On the other hand there are religions which teach that the religions, even as they are, are equal. But they do not tell us how this superfluous variety of religions has arisen and how a unity of spiritual outlook is ultimately to be achieved. The solution which Islam offers of this difficulty is contained in the attribute of Rabbul Alamin. God is the God of all the worlds. When a separate and special message was sent to any people, other peoples had their own separate and special messages. When separate messages ceased, the one message that was sent was addressed to all peoples and designed for all periods. In the conception of Rabbul Alamin, therefore, we have a solution of the difficulty. God is God of all. He did not exclude any people or any period from His spiritual sustenance. Prophets and messengers were sent—when they were sent separately—to all and sundry. But when the stage was set for a universal teaching, a universal teaching was sent. The attribute Rabbul Alamin used in the very beginning of a chapter of the Quran revealed quite early was a kind of signal that now at last a universal teaching, a teaching which was to unite mankind had come. The word Rab also indicates the important truth that God fulfils His purpose in stages. He is a Creator, Developer and Sustainer. He begins with low beginnings and raises them to the highest pinnacles. This is His law and His plan of creation. Even if we concentrate for the time being on the present world, if we concentrate, that is to say, on the here and ignore the hereafter, we have to admit that that indeed is the plan of God. Sometimes we become disturbed by haunting doubts and begin to wonder whether God is really succeeding with His plans. Every time a messenger comes, a little advance in the spiri-

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tual scale takes place, but this advance is followed by decay. The hands of the clock are set back as it were and we have to begin again. But let us not forget the strange thing that periods of beneficent interference by God continue to come. So there is no question of the failure of the divine plan. Only it seems the plan must work by stages. There have been stages before.

Adam, Noah, 'Abraham, Moses and Jesus are stages. And now the universal teaching of Islam must realise itself by stages. The attribute Rabbul Alamin admits by implication the facts of evolution as they are commonly presented. In fact it extends the concept to the spiritual process. Only, evolution must entail a purpose, a big purpose, instead of being purposeless as ordinarily conceived by men of science. Evolution in the physical world seems to have been designed to produce the body and brain of man and in the spiritual world to produce the Prophet and his universal message. The body and brain of man mark the height of perfection in the physical world ; the Prophet of Islam marks the height of perfection in the spiritual world. The attribute of Rabbul Alamin also points to the everlasting and infinite character of the onward march of the human personality. Everything points to the secu rity and survival of man. Man, therefore, must survive and continue to march onward for ever and ever. It means that the human personality must endure in the hereafter and live not as a satiated creature, but striving and progressing for ever towards infinite ends. The attribute of Rabbul Alamin also disposes of a criticism often made of religion—that it, for all time, pins down man to ideas conceived at a certain time to meet only certain needs. But the God of Islam is the Lord of *all* the worlds. He is mindful of changing conditions. His universal teaching in the Quran comprehends all needs of all men—even those needs which were going to arise in times far off. There is evidence for this in history and in our own time. Last of all fhe attribute of Rabbu lAlamin is a declaration that the toundations of the unity of the human race have at

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last been laid and that the divine plan will now move more directly and more rapidly towards that unity, and that accordingly the duty of those who wish to serve this plan is to think more and more in terms of humanity in general and not in terms of this or that section of humanity.

The next two attributes of which the Fatiha speaks are Rahman and Rahim both of which are related to Rahmat, meaning mercy. But of these 'Rahman' indicates the Bounteous and the Beneficent Who gives abundantly out of sheer grace, man having done nothing to deserve it ; while Rahim indicates One Who is Oft-returning to reward and mercy. The Holy Prophet is reported to have said that the attribute of Rahman manifests itself in the mercies of the present life and Rahim in the mercies of the next. This also shows that Rahman is the administrator of undeserved grace and Rahim the administrator of rewards. So there is an implied reference to the hereafter in the attribute of Rahim. The present life is a time of toil and trial. Life hereafter is a more manifest working out of the toils and trials of the present. Rahman is a negation of any idea of atonement. Atonement implies that God is unable or unwilling to forgive without a compensation or sacrifice of some sort. Rahman implies both the power and the willingness to forgive out of sheer grace. Rahim, on the other hand, implies One Who rewards liberally. It indicates the possibility of continuous and infinite progress. The smallest good act is like sowing a seed which under liberal reward ultimately grows into a tree. The hereafter is often But described as a place of plenty and idle monotony. continuous requital must entail continuous progress. The attribute of Rahim which entails continuous requital must entail a negation of idle monotony. The hereafter must be a condition of living entailing moral and spiritual effort and moral and spiritual reward. In the present life there is often a slipping back. The chance of error and evil is great. There is no such chance in the hereafter. But the possibility of progressive advancement must be continuous even as the

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progressive knowledge of God must be continuous. For reflecting believers there is joy and hope in these attributes. The possibility of infinite progress for everybody and every nation must imply an unlimited number of fields for human activity. Human conflicts in the present world arise because of a narrowness of vision. A little trust in the bounty of God and in the breadth of His rewards would make all the difference. Political fears and rivalries spring out of this lack of vision. A Godly people have never been deterred by apparent lack of means or apparent lack of opportunity. The attitude which God—as Rahman and Rahim—expects man to have towards His physical bounties, He expects us to have also towards His spiritual bounties. That is the attitude which Muslims should have towards their holy Book, the Quran. The Quran was taught by the Rahman.

الرحمن علم القرآن

The Graceful God taught the Quran. And now the Rahim is to reward our attempts to reflect upon its meaning. The worst symptom of Muslim decadence to-day is their lack of trust in the bounty of the Quran and their lack of faith in the enormous dimensions of that bounty. These dimensions are to be measured by the infinite attribute of Rahim—the oft-requiting and oft-rewarding God. The Quran we should treat as an open book at all times, one which continues ever to yield fruit.

The fourth attribute in the Fatiha is Malik-i-Yaum-il-Din. Malik is Master, not a mere Judge or King, and the Yaum ul-Din ordinarily translated as the Day of Judgment, means any important Period of Time. The difference between a Judge who is also Master and not a mere Judge is evident enough. The judge unless he is untrue to his calling must only judge; he is not to forgive unless this is provided in the law. But the Master Judge can forgive. The Master King can rise above the limitations peculiar to constitutional kings. He can forgive and, being Master and King, will be

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more concerned in the ultimate good of his creation We have, therefore, to approach Him in hope and fear, and guard against extremes of all kinds. Master of all Great Days, that being the general sense of this attribute, implies that behind great events there is always the hand of God at work. Particularly is this so when God sends down a messenger to initiate a new spiritual outlook, a new period of progress. Then does God almost show His face. Miracles abound and events seem to move in one visible direction. In the time of every prophet has this happened. But in the time of the Prophet of Islam this hand of God working behind was more transparent than ever. The life of the Prophet and the rise of early Islam illustrate this so well that about 1400 years have passed away but the sense of utter amazement which the achievements of early Islam produced in man has not abated at all. Malik-i-Yaum-ul-Din also signifies that God is the Master of Great Achievements. The world process has its peaks and pits—periods which show great creative activity and periods which show decay. This attribute of Malik-i-Yaum-ul-Din shows that God's interference shows itself during creative activity. When God withdraws Himself from His role of the Master of Great Days the creative activity slackens and ultimately drops into decay and degradation. Creation is due to divine interference, decay to the lack of it. The attribute also points to the futility of passing events. Some people become over-impressed by them. That is not the sort of thing we should do if we really regard God as the Master of Great Days. Passing events are like common days—not as important as a day on which a great result is registered. The taking of Mecca by the Prophet after years of cruel persecution was such a day. Right up to that day the Prophet's persecutors believed they had not lost very much !

If after this survey of the attributes we look rapidly at the prayers which correspond to these attributes we should have further insight into the character of God as taught by Islam. "Thee alone do we worship" is an affirmation of the undivided loyalty

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which the only Praiseworthy God should have from us. The prayer protects the devotee from that form of ungodliness which the spirit of Islam detests—setting up other things or persons as equals of God. The Quran abounds in logical argument as well as psychological persuasion against this variety of ungodliness, now an individual superstition, now a national character. All manner of disloyalty must be shunned, and not merely in letter but also in spirit. Disloyalty to God is called *Shirk* in Islam and *Shirk* is the worst of sins. It militates against true human advancement. The modern believer assailed by doubt and uncertainty might point his finger to the European nations and say, "Are they not immersed in *Shirk* from head to foot and yet are they not advanced beyond those who are apparently free from *Shirk* ?" This sort of doubt is of no avail. European advance seems to impress most people unduly. But everybody knows it is not rooted in any moral or spiritual purposes. It cannot be very long-lived. It holds example of great ingenuity, great endurance, and great planning, but not of great unselfishness. European genius is employed in self-aggrandisement or self-glory, not for God or man. As the Quran says of them الذين ضل سعيهم فى الحيوة الدنيا Their effort is lost in seeking the life of this world (18 : 105). "Thee alone do we worship" also speaks of worshippers in the plural. This means that belief in the Muslim God entails a strictly socialised attitude—even organisation—on the part of human beings. Such an attitude is, of course, the reverse of selfishness. It is also of the essence of wisdom. Virtue and good feeling have prolonged existence if they are promoted on a social scale. Also there is such a thing as social morality and social behaviour. When society affirms its loyalty to the source of all goodness and wisdom, the good and wisdom of individuals is affirmed by implication, but when individuals affirm privately and individually their loyalty to the one God, the social whole has still to define its attitude to God. The social problem in the modern world has become so acute because the spirit of Godliness has been ruled out of social affairs as though it had nothing to do with them. The plural—

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"Thee alone do we worship"—is therefore full of the highest significance. It shows that God wants to meet us not merely as individuals but also as groups, nations and indeed as mankind. The next prayer is "Thee alone do we ask for help." Again we have the plural we. Asking for help, however, entails belief in the essential freedom of man. There are constraints in human life —constraints imposed by environment and constraints imposed by man's own nature. The constraints are ultimately for the good of man—they increase the value of his achievement. But we do not have only constraints and constraints. The spirit of man is able to choose, may be within limits. The most utterly constrained individual is free—free at least to ask for God's help. In the prayer—Thee do we ask for help—we have the germ of human freedom. Prayer cuts the vicious circle of human constraints and makes man free. The next prayer is—Guide Thou us to the straight path. The straight path implies the existence of crooked and longer paths, to which the straight and short path is to be preferred. There is at the end of the chapter a specification of the straight path. Being shown the straight path is not enough. That may amount only to intellectual insight. One of the most widespread of modern errors is to regard intellectual insight as over-important. Understanding and insight are important enough but their importance is subordinate to practical achievement. Some of the cleverest men and women in the modern world are busy improving their understanding of man and the world. Their time for action never arrives. Others, of course, are busy in activity of the crooked or unnecessarily laborious sort. Those who have achieved some insight must begin to act. The prayer of the Fatiha ends up by saying, 'The path of those whom Thou hast favoured, not of those who have incurred Thy anger nor of those who have gone astray'. We have been taught to pray for a life of achievement not merely for a life of insight. We have been taught to pray for protection against both pride and error. It is sometimes said that as Muslims have been taught to pray for the straight path, the straight path has still to be shown. That is to say the Muslim

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teaching is not final. On this vital point the teaching of the Quran is quite unambiguous. The straight path for which Muslims have been taught to pray is laid in the Quran. The prayer for the straight path is prayer for insight into the meaning of the Quran The finality of the Quran is not merely a claim. It is a historical fact. Fourteen hundred years have passed away and no religious or secular teaching has in fact displaced it.

IV

The general conception of God in Islam emerges out of the basic attributes of God and prayers taught in the Fatiha. We can know God only through His attributes More than His attributes we may not know. True, we often want to know more. But we should remember that even in our search of knowledge of the physical world we cannot go beyond a knowledge of properties. Our knowledge of the physical world also is knowledge only of properties. We distinguish between various kinds of properties, some more important than others. But still what we ultimately have is only properties. We have tried to formulate the character of the ultimate stuff of the physical world or of the world as a whole. There has been one speculation after another, no final solution. There is the table, for instance. We describe its colour, shape, size and so on. We can break up the wood and treat it with different processes and under different conditions. But every time it will be more and more properties, never *the* table, or the stuff of which the table is made. So with God. God is not visible to us in the way the external world is. But He shows Himself to us through His attributes :

لا تدركه الابصار و هو يدرك الابصار

The eyes comprehend Him not but He comprehends the eyes (6 : 105).

But the attributes commonly described are such as on a small scale are possessed also by human beings. This is as it should be. Because, as the Prophet said, God made man in His own image. Still, because of this,

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God is not to be conceived as man on a large scale. The attributes are made to appear like those of man, for, otherwise they would be incomprehensible by man. The distinctive attributes of God are quite different. These we will never know except through the attributes through which God manifests Himself to man and the rest of the world, which seem common between God and man and which philosophers sometimes contemptuously describe as anthropomorphic. The character and essence of God are not made up of anthropomorphic attributes. These constitute His distinctive character. His distinctive character is constituted by His distinctive attributes which in the language of the Quran are called His *Arsh*. Ignorant critics of the Quran have attacked the Quran as though it taught that God was seated on a big throne spreading over the seas and reaching the skies. In spite of the fact that such a notion is contrary to the clear teaching of the Quran that everything is held by God and that nothing holds Him, Islam is supposed to have taught something as obviously silly as that. Actually the Quranic conception of *Arsh* is a lofty conception which raises God above all anthropomorphic descriptions and points to a distinctive status of His not to be comprehended by human beings except again through His anthropomorphic attributes. The distinctiveness of God is asserted clearly in the short but pregnant verse ليس كمثله شيئا 'There is nothing or nobody like Him.' This alone should have saved criticism of the sort I have cited. The attributes ascribed by the Quran to God are taken in their human sense and then difficulties are raised with regard to them. The speech of God for instance is an important attribute which should be taken as a manifestation of the great attribute of Rahman. The Quran itself is a demonstration of His speech. And we are told clearly that God's speech is not like, man's. Still we are asked, 'Does God have a tongue' We must, therefore, emphasise the uniqueness and distinctiveness of God. The distinctiveness of God is partially brought out in some of His negative attributes such as the one I have just mentioned: 'Nothing is

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like Him,' and such as are mentioned in the famous set of verses known as the Ayat al-Kursi. But we have a clear reference to His distinctiveness in such verses as :

ان ربكم الله الذى خلق السموات والارض فى ستة ايام ثم استوى على العرش- يدبر الامر

Lo! your lord is Allah who created the Heavens and the Earth in Six Days, then he established Himself upon the Arsh (Throne) directing all things. (10 : 5).

After creation, establishment on the 'Arsh! Creation is an anthropomorphic attribute—hence a reference to His distinctive attributes was in point. God continually manifests Himself to man and the world, by taking on man-like attributes and then withdraws Himself into His own distinctiveness. Man might have some insight into the distinctive attributes hereafter, but not here. Here he must use the smoke glass of his anthropomorphic concepts and terminology to protect himself from the glare of the full view of God. One of the most interesting descriptions of the *Arsh* is that it lies on water وكان عرشه على الماء Anybody not familiar with the metaphor of the Quran might become misled into supposing that this is either a gross description of some sort or sheer poetry. Actually it is neither the one nor the other. We should be willing to concede that a book like the Quran could not talk of anything as simple as the Throne of God floating on the high seas. Nor is sheer poetry the way of the Quran. Water in the Quranic list of metaphors often, nearly always, means knowledge and guidance which God sends down through revelation, earth being often, nearly always, compared to human understanding and human planning. 'The 'Arsh of God rests on water,' ' therefore, means the distinctiveness of God manifests itself through divine revelation. Or, we might take water to be the source of life and possibly all existence as the Greek philosopher Thales took it to be. In that case ' And His Arsh rests on water ' would mean that the distinctiveness of God

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expresses itself through life and especially through that highest manifestation of life, man.

V

The attributes of God make a moral as well as a metaphysical science. In theology the ultimate discussions range round the exact meaning of the attributes. Insight is insight into attributes. All the attributes and they may be infinite are important and all make a consistent whole. A very common error is to regard attributes in isolation and then to raise questions about them. When all the attributes are kept in view, no difficulties arise. The most interesting application a knowledge of divine attributes can have is in the sphere of morals. The Islamic definition of the moral criterion is '*Abdiyat* or absorption of the divine attributes—imitating the character of God. The definition has a far-reaching practical import. It makes the moral criterion objective and concrete. It makes moral effort worth while, measurable and progressive. In the Fatiha itself we have an illustration of this. We may conceive the Fatiha as an approach by God to man and equally as an approach by man to God. The first attribute mentioned after the proper name Allah is Rabbul Alamin. It is the most general attribute that could be mentioned when God addresses man. From Rabbul Alamin the next step of descent, as it were, is Rahman, which is less general than Rabb but more general than Rahim. From Rahman to Rahim is the next step of descent and from Rahim to Malik the next. In Malik the attribute becomes most concrete, and most individual. The attribute of Malik entails the responsibility of judging individuals. As Malik, therefore, God becomes present to each and every individual. This is the utmost descent possible when God, approaches man. Now if man wishes to ascend to God naturally he must begin at the point at which God's descent ends. That is the point of Malik. Man must try to assimilate and imitate the attribute of Malik, try and become something of the divine Judge. Every man a judge—that may seem

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strange. And yet that is an every-day phenomenon. Only we do not judge as well as we might. We have a supreme power given to us—that of judging ourselves, and others, our friends, and enemies, a power which no power on earth may deprive us of. In our ascent to God we should first be judged by the use we make of this power. If we hold God as our model we also should never judge anybody without adequate knowledge. Our approval and disapproval, our love and hatred should be directed to those who have come under our judgment and not to all and sundry. Also, our love and our hatred should be proportionate to the deeds which we judge. Also in our negative judgments. We should keep in view all extenuating circumstances we should listen to no *sifarish*—being judges ourselves we should not degrade ourselves by making others judges over ourselves. Lastly our judgments should be duly tempered with mercy. All this relates to our social relations and social obligations. Yet this is the first step on the ascent to God. The next step is from Malik to Rahim which is to learn to return liberally, the kindnesses or good turns of others to reward them not merely by an equal but by a greater measure, to encourage those under us, and not to be niggardly in our praise of others. The next step will be from Rahim to Rahman. This is to give to others and to work for others without any kindnesses or services received from them or without any hope of such kindnesses or services. This is man as Rahman imitating the divine attribute of administering undeserved grace. The next and final step is that of Rabb. This is to be altruistic in the widest and the highest sense of the term, to devote oneself ceaselessly and one's all to the steady promotion of the highest good of humanity. This is the step in the upward march of man which no man has achieved but the Prophet of Islam. His life and teaching are evidence of this. He is the truest human embodiment of the attribute of Rabbul Alamin, and he, therefore, is the most deserving of the highest praise which as a reflex of the praise due to God can be given to man. To this refers the verse of the Quran (17 : 80) which

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was only a claim when it was first revealed in Mecca but which in the light of history became an established fact.

عسى ان يبعثك ربك مقاما محمودا

"It may be that thy Lord will raise thee to a praised state."

The attributes thus provide us with the practical science of morals. They provide, however, also a technique of prayer. Prayer is the tool by means of which we may cut the vicious circle of circumstances and constraints. In the Fatiha we have been taught to ask for God's help. And in the Fatiha itself we have been taught to address our prayers to the right attributes. There must be an appropriateness in our prayers. The Fatiha is an illustration of this appropriateness. Each prayer in it is addressed to an appropriate attribute This appropriateness we must try and incorporate in our daily prayers.

VI

In the few minutes that I may still have I propose to refer to an application of one of the most important attributes of God, which should be of great present-day interest. The Chapter Al-Kahf or The Cave is commonly regarded as one of the most important in the holy Quran. It is said that at the time of the revelation it was guarded by 70,000 angels. Such extraordinary protection can only refer to its subsequent importance and interest. It is well known that at the time of their revelation all parts of the Qūran were equally well protected. Of the subsequent importance of this Chapter we have evidence in that the Holy Prophet is said to have commended to believers the study of its first and last ten verses at the advent of the dangerous latter days. Now when we read the first verses of this Chapter we find there-in a round summary of the religious beliefs of the European nations and when we read the last verses of this Chapter we find therein a summarised description of their achievements in science

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and technology, of their intensely worldly outlook, and of their mutual jealousies. Such a chapter cannot but be pregnant with meaning for us who live in the present time and ponder over the problems of the present.

And such a chapter cannot but give us an insight into the whole of that process of history which has led to the present plight of Islam and to the social and political ascendancy of the European nations, completely lost though they are in a race for the world and its possessions. We have all these subjects discussed in this great chapter, and a great deal else besides. In verses (18 : 46—49) more or less towards the end we also have a description of the schemes of reconstruction which are being announced by the different European nations. We then have God's own comment upon these schemes. Every new beginning, every new step in the onward march of man is compared by the Quran to the advent of Adam and to the controversy which ensued between Adam and Iblis, between the followers of the one and the followers of the other. I believe that Adam and Iblis were actual characters, Adam being the first revealed teacher, and Iblis being the first denier and transgressor. The two stood for two different orders—Adam for the one which God out of His infinite wisdom had proposed as the first social scheme for man and Iblis for the old one which God wanted to displace. Fundamental guidance, guidance which marks great days and the coming of great epochs and great and far-reaching changes always comes from God. For He is the Guide. This simple truth Adam affirmed but Iblis denied. In the time of every great change which has the sanction of God we have the history of Adam and Iblis repeated. Little wonder in pointing to the present conflict between spiritual and secular forces God refers to the history—for I do not think it is a mere parable—of Adam and Iblis. The reference shows that a reconstruction is imminent.

And remember when We commanded the angels to bow with Adam (*i.e.* to join their powers with him in the foundation of the first social order,) they all bowed

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except Iblis; he (the Iblis) was one of the Djinn (a party of hardened reactionaries), so he disobeyed the command of his Lord. Do you, says God turning to the true sons of Adam in our time, want to give Me up and make friends with Iblis and his progeny and yet they are all your enemies? (18 : 46).

It is a warning to the sons of Adam against the secular schemes and specious philosophies of the West. But a little later we have God's argument against all secular schemes of reconstruction. Says God:

I asked them not to assist Me at the time of the creation of the heavens and the earth (that is the first social order) nor at the time of the creation of their own souls. Nor could I have made My helpers those who lead astray. (18 : 47).

The attribute of creation is stressed and those who seek to build a new heaven and a new earth—new world orders—out of their own worldly wisdom are told that whenever a new creation—a new order—is in demand, it needs the creative power of the Creator. New creations have ever come through God's own creation and through his efficient and obedient agents, the angels. The text goes on to give some idea of the eventual fate of these authors of reconstructional schemes. The whole passage is a clear promise that the foundations of the New World Order will be laid not by the nations whose strife made the New World Order necessary but by those mute and apparently miserable sons of Adam who will guard their faith in God and in His supreme creative powers, and who will turn to Him in prayer and piety and enlist the sympathy and support of invisible forces. And it stands to reason also. In the past, new orders have not come through the worldly wise but always through the spiritually strong. It cannot be different to-day. The Creator must create again and again every time a creative act becomes necessary and create through the agency of his obedient servants and not through those who disobey. We have no reason, therefore, to

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become impressed by the secularity and atheism of the modern nations. We have only to turn to our Creator.

VII

I have no time left now. But may I, in the last one or two minutes left to me, say that I am well aware of philosophical difficulties which theistic conceptions seem to entail. But I am not deterred by those difficulties. I keep my common sense alert and I suggest that you do the same. Not a conception which does not raise difficulties. And while difficulties remain, solutions also are not lacking. There is always a variety of them at hand. Possibly I fancy some of these solutions more than I fancy others. But when we deal with a religious conception the question is not, what is the philosophical status of that conception ? but rather, what difference did it or does it make to man and the world ? The question, therefore, in the present instance is, what difference did the conception of God as taught by Islam make to those who came under it or even near it as so many millions did in India and elsewhere ? I do not suggest that the Islamic conception is without philosophical foundation. Far from it. Only, I do not regard the philosophical assessment very important. Let us remember also that the Islamic conception did not come with the advent of Islam in the historical sense. According to Islam's own teaching, God—the Rabbul Alamin started guiding mankind from the time they attained to a worthiness for such guidance. The guidance was not worked out in all its important details until the revelation of the Quran. But it was present in outline from the very start, as indeed it should have been. Modern anthropology, by the way, is very confused on the subject. Do not trust it. It affords evidence for both monotheism and polytheism in primitive culture. That makes it possible for us to say that even according to anthropological research the view of Islam that monotheism in outline was taught by God from the very start is correct. For it is possible for monotheism to

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degenerate again and again into polytheism. It does so in historical times. The conception of God in Islam, therefore, goes far back into the very beginning of God's guidance. It is a conception which has a stately history. It is a conception which has had a large and, I should say, unparalleled influence. And it is a conception which has an equally large and unparalleled future. For who can say that the Quran, a spiritual world by itself, has yet exhausted the treasure of its truths ?

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THE DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT

Under Christian belief we are all 'born sinners'. Adam sinned and through him we are all condemned. The Lord God, however, took mercy on us and sent His only begotten son who died for us while we were yet sinners. Being the descendants of Adam, we were the enemies of God, but were reconciled to Him by the death of His son who died for us. But the question arises, what was the punishment awarded to Adam when he sinned against the Lord ? It is written "And unto Adam He said, "Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife and has eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee saying, thou shalt not eat of it, *cursed is the ground for thy sake*, in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee and thou shalt eat the herb of the tree. In the sweat of thy face, shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground." The sentence against Eve runs thus, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception, in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children and thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee." (Genesis 3 : 16—19). The Verdict of God was pronounced in the above quoted w ords of the book of Genesis. But has the vicarious atonement of Jesus brought about our redemption ? Is not woman still subject to the Divine anger ? Labour pains are her permanent legacy, from Evo. Does not the cursed ground still bring forth 'therns and thistles' for the Sons of Adam ? Do we not still 'eat the herbs of the field'? Has Christianity produced a single soul who does not eat his bread in the sweat of his face ? It is said that we are 'weak in faith'. It may be so. But has Christendom produced a single woman who no more brought forth children in sorrow with all her faith, piety and devotion ? This shows that we are not redeemed of the Divine wrath. The Divine sentence continues to run and we are still 'condemned' and 'unsaved' what does atonement mean to us then ?

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